

USS California*

Aaron Lloyd McMurtrey

Birthplace: Kemp, Oklahoma

Date: Feb. 14, 1914

Hometown: Durant, Oklahoma

Enlisted: Dallas, Texas

Date: Oct. 5, 1940

Rating: Seaman 1st Class (S1c)

Description: A Seaman's duties included performing ordinary deck duties in connection with the upkeep and operations of the ship, such as painting, cleaning, and polishing of the ship's brightwork; the collection and disposal of garbage; maintenance and repair of various types of equipment. He also handled ropes and wires; stored and secured items; assisted with the movement of cargo on and off the ship. He stood watches as lookout, telephone talker, messenger, or similar duties. Also was member of a gun crew.

Promotions (dates not available):

Seaman Apprentice upon enlistment

Seaman 2nd Class:

Seaman 1st Class:

Loss Date: Dec. 7, 1941

Duty Stations:

USS California (BB 44): 11/24/1940

Naval Training Station San Diego, California: 10/08/1940

Awards and Decorations*

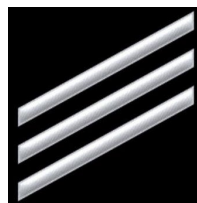
Purple Heart Medal

Combat Action Ribbon

Good Conduct Medal

American Defense Service Medal (Fleet Clasp)

American Campaign Medal



OVER



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Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Medal (Bronze Star)
World War II Victory Medal

*This biography reflects only information present in the service member's Official Military Personnel File and NAVPERS 1650, Transmittal of and/or Entitlement to Awards. Many Pearl Harbor records were lost as a result of the attack, so certain Sailors' entries may be incomplete.



U.S.S CALIFORNIA (BB 44) PRESS PACKAGE

Frequently Asked Questions:

** Answers can be attributed to Dr. Laurel Freas,
Project Lead for the Pearl Harbor Ships Project (DPAA).*

*** When did the DPAA begin the process of identifying USS California?**

The process of identifications for the USS California began with the disinterments of 25 Unknowns associated with the ship between January and March 2018. Given the success of the USS Oklahoma project, DPAA has expanded its work to three other battleships involved in the Dec. 7, 1941 attack on Pearl Harbor: USS West Virginia, USS California, and USS Utah.

*** How many Sailors were unaccounted for from the USS California, and how many have been identified?**

There were 103 total casualties from USS California. At the start of the project, there were 20 unresolved casualties from the ship and 25 associated Unknowns buried at the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific (NMCP) in Hawaii. Disinterments were completed in March of 2018, and as of January 2004, there have been five identifications from USS California.

*** What are Unresolved Casualties?**

Unresolved Casualties are individual service members known to have died in a particular incident but for whom no remains have been recovered or identified. They might also be regarded as "missing in action" or, more formally, "killed in action, body not recovered."

*** What are Unknowns?**

Unknowns are remains of U.S. service members that were unable to be identified as a specific individual at the time of their death/recovery during the historic conflict era, and therefore were buried in one of the U.S.'s memorial cemeteries in graves marked as "Unknown."

*** What are the main differences between California and Oklahoma and what are the challenges?**

The main difference between USS California and USS Oklahoma is that the assemblage of remains from each ship shows different patterns of commingling, and so the strategies to segregate these commingled remains into distinct individuals are slightly different, even though the underlying scientific techniques we use are the same.



Additionally, in many cases the skeletons from the USS California are more complete than those from the USS Oklahoma are, and so there are additional and different analyses that we have to do to make sure that all the elements go together and represent a single individual. The largest challenge we face are the unresolved individuals that we don't have any Family Reference Samples for, as not having that DNA information can make it very difficult to demonstrate conclusively that a given set of remains belongs to a specific individual.

*** Who makes identifications, and how?**

Scientists at Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA) labs in Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam, Hawaii, and Offutt Air Force Base, Omaha, Nebraska, develop and recommend cases to the DPAA Science Director, who is an Armed Forces medical examiner, for final identification. Remains are identified using a combination of forensic anthropology and odontology analyses, material evidence analysis of any personal effects present, and isotopic and DNA analyses of bone samples, along with comparisons to the service members' medical records and DNA reference samples from USS West Virginia families. The DoD now has more than 85 percent of required Family Reference Samples to support DNA analysis on the USS West Virginia remains, as well as many medical and dental records from the ship's service members.

*** What is the basic identification process?**

Once an Unknown has been disinterred from the cemetery and the remains are accessioned into the laboratory, DPAA scientists conduct inventories and preliminary analyses of the remains, as well as identify bones and teeth to be sampled for DNA and/or isotope analyses. Forensic anthropologists work to resolve commingling in cases where the remains of multiple individuals are mixed together. After the remains are segregated into discrete individuals, the anthropologists analyze them to estimate the sex, age, ancestry, and stature of the individual and identify signs of trauma and earlier injuries and illness. Forensic odontologists examine the dentition and compare the teeth present in the remains to the antemortem dental records available for the unresolved service members.

DNA analysis is conducted at the Armed Forces DNA Identification Laboratory (AFDIL), where scientists extract DNA from the bone and tooth samples submitted by DPAA, determine the DNA sequence for each sample, and compare that sequence information against Family Reference Samples submitted by relatives of the missing service members. Family Reference Samples are typically obtained by the Navy, reaching out to families via letters and phone calls, requesting a sample (usually a cheek swab) for comparison to the remains.

**** Attributed to Capt. Jeff Draude, Director, Director, Navy Casualty Office.**

What is the basic identification process?

The DNA profiling process begins with a sample from a surviving family member; these samples are referred to as "reference samples."



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During Project Oklahoma, the Navy's POW/MIA Office reached out to identified family members, by letter or phone call, requesting their participation in the Family Reference Sample Program. Family members can also call directly to the Navy's POW/MIA Office requesting to participate as well. These efforts result in positive matches and identifications of loved ones lost on the USS California.

Who makes identifications, and how?

Scientists with the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA), in Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam, Hawaii and Offutt Air Force Base in Omaha, Nebraska are tasked with the responsibility to identify unaccounted for past-conflict service members. Identifications are primarily made by matching the DNA reference samples from surviving family members with those unaccounted for from the USS California. Other supporting documents such as any available medical and dental records are also used during the research and identification processes.

What is the Navy's policy concerning family notification?

Navy Casualty's policy for notification is to work directly with the Primary Next of Kin (PNOK) with matters involving the remains of their loved one.

What is the Navy's notification process?

Once a positive identification has been made by DPAA, the Navy's Casualty Office conducts an official notification to the PNOK. This individual then decides if they would like to be the Person Authorized to Direct Disposition (PADD). A Navy Service Casualty Officer (SCO) from the Navy's POW/MIA Office is assigned to coordinate a formal ID Brief with the PADD to discuss the identification process and the ensuing next steps. The Navy SCO and a Casualty Assistance Calls Officer (CACO) conduct the ID brief together via various methods; such as in-person, virtual, or telephonically. During the ID brief, the PADD is formally informed of the identification process involved with their particular loved one. Also discussed are the PADD's wishes for final disposition of the remains and the various entitlements granted to the PADD to facilitate a dignified and proper burial for the fallen Sailor.

How are CACOs assigned?

CACOs are assigned regionally, according to the location of the PADD.

How does the Navy support the fallen Sailors' families?

Once the ID brief has concluded, the CACO is the family's local liaison. The CACO is responsible for assisting the family directly with entitlements and final disposition. The family is given the choice to have the remains interred in a local National or State cemetery, a private cemetery, re-interred in the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific (NMCP) in Hawaii, or Arlington National Cemetery. Families may also choose to have the remains cremated and retained with the family.



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Navy Mortuary Affairs coordinates with the funeral home, selected by the PADD, to assist with the preparation and movement of the remains. Typically, the remains arrive a couple days prior to any services.

What expenses does the Navy pay for?

The Navy covers all primary mortuary expenses; such as the preparation of the remains, casket of choice, all transportation of remains from the lab to final resting place, and family travel & lodging for up to three family members. Additionally, dependent upon what services the family selects for disposition, an appropriate allotment of funds are provided to the family to assist in covering secondary funeral and cemetery expenses. A full funeral detail (rifle salute, burial team, and TAPS) is also offered to families.

How can media get in touch with family members?

The Navy respects family privacy. Each family contacted is asked to fill out a media release form indicating whether or not media contact is desired. If a positive response is given, the Navy Personnel Command's Public Affairs Office will provide the requesting media outlet's information to the family member designated as the point of contact. Media will not be given family contact information.

Although it has been almost 80 years since the attack on Pearl Harbor, why do you believe it is important to identify the remains of these fallen heroes?

When briefing families, we often hear things like "My family did not believe he was dead" or "He probably was not onboard the ship" or "maybe one day he would walk through the door."

Being able to recover and identify the remains of these Sailors aids in the closure to these families. Like all forces in the Department of Defense (DoD), it is especially important to the Navy to honor our Sailors and Marines who paid the ultimate sacrifice in giving their lives for our country.

What does it mean to the families to finally have this closure and bring their loved one home?

Often the notification and identification briefing can be emotional, overwhelming, and relieving for the families. Most families we speak with cannot believe their loved one has actually been recovered and/or identified after so many years.



USS California, photographed at sea, during the middle-1930s. (U.S. Naval History and Heritage Command Photograph)

U.S.S CALIFORNIA (BB 44) FACT SHEET

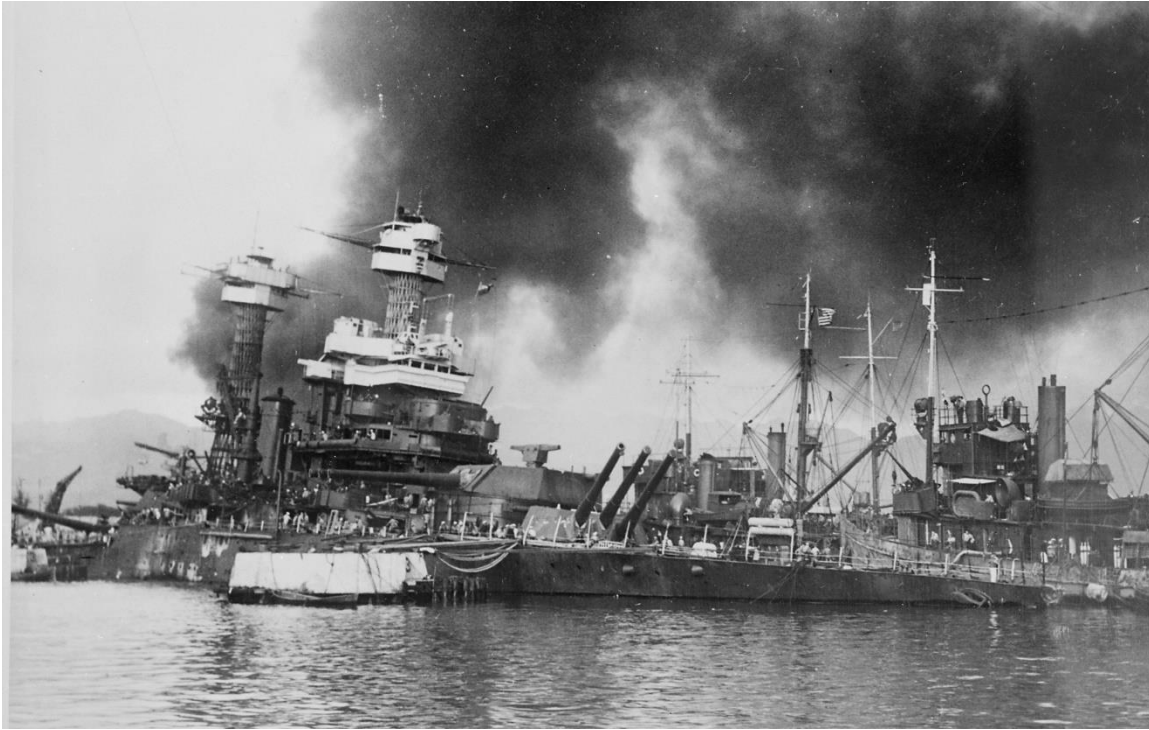
USS California, a 32,300-ton Tennessee class battleship, was built at the Mare Island Navy Yard, California, and commissioned in August of 1921. During the 1920s and 1930s, she actively participated in the activities of the United States Battle Fleet, often acting as flagship. In 1925, California was one of the ships that conducted a major trans-Pacific cruise to Australia and New Zealand in an important demonstration of the Navy's trans-Pacific strategic "reach."

She participated in a number of fleet readiness exercises in both the Atlantic and Pacific. She also took part in a naval review for President Calvin Coolidge in 1927, for President Herbert Hoover in 1930 and for President Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1934.

In April 1940, as a result of tensions with Japan over the invasion of Manchuria, the United States transferred the fleet homeport from California to Pearl Harbor in Hawaii as a deterrent to further aggression by Japan.

December 7, 1941

West Virginia was among almost half of the U.S. Pacific Fleet -- consisting of 150 vessels -- at Naval Base Pearl Harbor Hawaii that Sunday morning when attacked by air forces of the Japanese Empire. California was moored on the southeastern side of Ford Island, the southernmost ship along Battleship Row.



USS California sunk in shallow water at Pearl Harbor after the attack.

At the time of the attack, the ship had two of her five-inch guns and two of her .50-cal. machine guns designated as ready guns, with 50 five-inch shells and 400 .50-cal. rounds ready. The gun crews engaged the enemy, but quickly expended their ammunition. While Sailors worked to bring ammunition from the magazines below decks topside, the ship was damaged by a pair of torpedoes and a bomb.

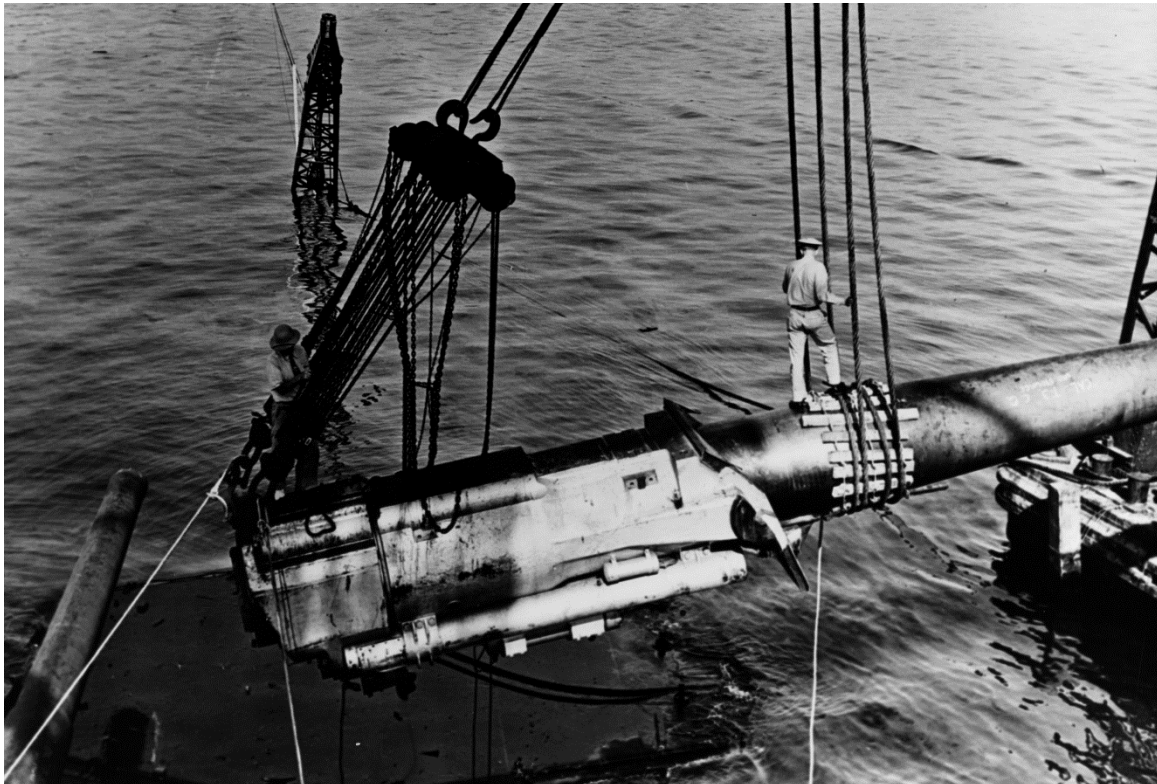
The ship was prepared for an inspection that morning, and the watertight doors were open. The doors were being closed when the torpedoes struck and flooding began. Many of the portholes and exterior doors were also, allowing more water to enter the ship. As uncontrolled flooding started to spread throughout the ship, California began to list to port.

Torpedo blasts had ruptured the forward fuel tanks, allowing water to enter the fuel system. The contamination shut down the ship's electrical system, hindering the efforts of damage control teams.

Between 8:15 and 9:15 a.m., dive-bombers repeatedly attacked California, causing further damage. One bomb penetrated the upper deck, ricocheted off the second and detonated in the ship's interior, where it caused extensive damage, started a serious fire, and killed around 50 men.

At around the same time, the boiler room crew got four of the boilers restarted, which restored power, but the fire had disabled the ship's electrical system, preventing the pumps from being used to keep the ship afloat. California slowly filled with water over the following three days and eventually sank.

Ninety-eight men perished and 61 were wounded in the attack. Four Sailors were posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor for their heroism during the attack.



One of California's guns being removed during 1942 salvage operations to lighten the ship before she could be raised. (Naval History and Heritage Command Collection)

Salvage of California

Over several months, salvage efforts proceeded as workers patched the hull and pumped out the water, re-floating California in March 1942. In April, the ship suffered an accidental explosion which caused serious flooding. The salvage team had to re-patch the hull and pump it out again. After several days, California entered dry dock. She was re-floated in June and remained in port for several months.

California departed Pearl Harbor proceeded to Puget Sound, where she would undergo permanent repairs and a major modernization lasting from October 1942 to January 1944. Afterwards, she began a series of sea trials followed by a shakedown cruise.



USS California underway, with camouflage paint. The ship had just received repairs in the Puget Sound Navy Yard, Bremerton, Washington. (U.S. Navy Photo)

Service in World War II

In May of 1944, California joined the fleet that was assembling in the central Pacific for the Mariana and Palau Islands campaign. The ship's new big guns provided bombardment and fire support for amphibious assaults on Saipan, Guam, and the Philippine Campaign, most notably the Battle of Leyte Gulf.

After taking part in the assault on Okinawa, California returned to the Philippines for maintenance, where news arrived of the Japanese surrender. She supported troops during the occupation of Japan, then joining USS Tennessee and several other vessels for the return to the United States. Ironically, they reached Philadelphia on Dec. 7.

She was formally placed in reserve, still in commission, in August of 1946, and decommissioned in February of 1947, remaining in the Navy's inventory until being stricken from the Naval Vessel Register in 1959. She was thereafter sold to the Bethlehem Shipbuilding Corporation.

Her 350-pound bronze bell is currently on display at the California State Capitol Park in Sacramento.



Christmas party for disadvantaged children, held on board California by her crew, at San Pedro, California, December 1921. (U.S. Naval History and Heritage Command Photograph)

For more information:

US Navy POW/MIA:

<https://www.mynavyhr.navy.mil/Support-Services/Casualty/POW-MIA-Branch/>

Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency and DNA Identification:

<http://www.dpaa.mil/>

<https://www.dpaa.mil/Resources/Fact-Sheets/Article-View/Article/569602/dpaa-laboratory/>

DPAA Public Affairs Office:

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